

CONAN THE  
BARBARIAN

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THE GREATEST SWORD-AND-SORCERY HERO OF ALL!

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COMICS  
CODE  
AUTHORITY

# CONAN

## THE BARBARIAN

TM

IN THE  
**COILS**  
OF THE  
**MAN-SERPENT!**



TM

MARVEL  
COMICS  
GROUP

BARRY  
SMITH





# CONAN THE BARBARIAN!™

## THE LURKER WITHIN!

### THE ROAD OF KINGS!

SNAKE-LIKE, IT WINDS ITS WAY AMONG THE CIVILIZED NATION-STATES--- AND, IF ONE FOLLOWS LONG ENOUGH ITS TWISTING AND TURNINGS, ONE STANDS AT LAST ALMOST WITHIN EARSHOT OF MANY-TOWERED NUMALIA, SECOND-GREATEST CITY OF NEMEDIA, THE SECOND-GREATEST HYBOREAN KINGDOM--- AND THEN---

AND THEN---  
ONE WAITS---

**HELP!**  
OH MITRA---  
MITRA---  
**HELP!**

BUT, ONE NEEDN'T  
WAIT LONG--!:

STAN LEE \* ROY THOMAS \* BARRY SMITH \* ADKINS + BUSCENA \* SAM ROSEN \* FREELY ADAPTED FROM THE STORY "THE GOD IN THE BOWL" BY ROBERT E. HOWARD  
EDITOR WRITER ARTIST EMBELLISHERS LETTERER CREATOR OF CONAN

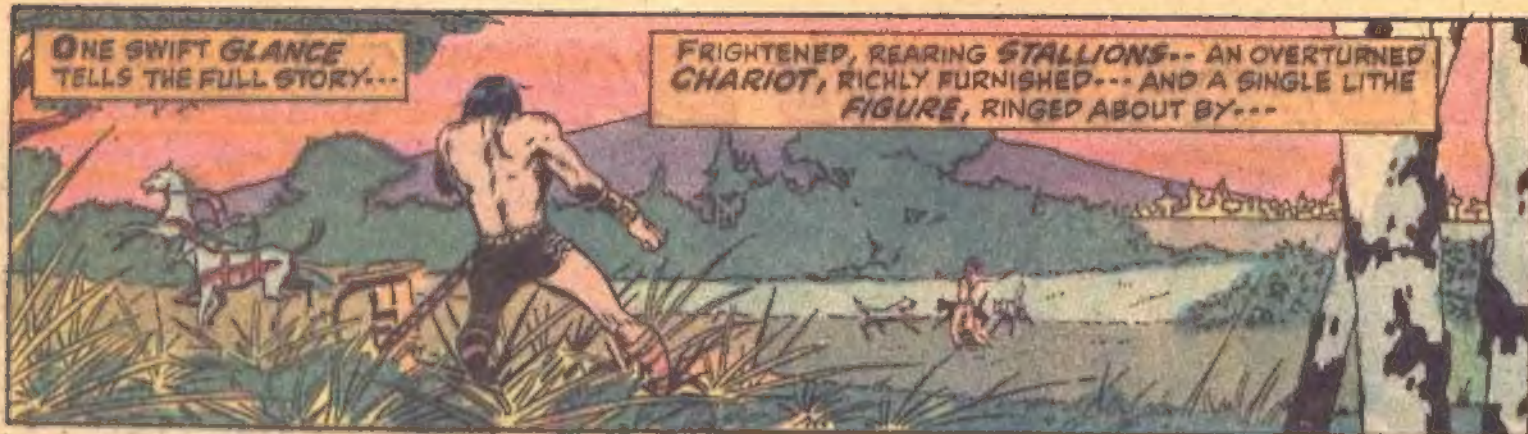
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ONE SWIFT GLANCE  
TELLS THE FULL STORY...

FRIGHTENED, REARING STALLIONS-- AN OVERTURNED  
CHARIOT, RICHLY FURNISHED--- AND A SINGLE LITHE  
FIGURE, RINGED ABOUT BY---



WOLVES!



ANOTHER MAN MIGHT WASTE PRECIOUS MOMENTS,  
DEBATING WHETHER OR NOT TO RISK HIS LIFE FOR  
SOMEONE HE HAS NEVER BEFORE SEEN ---

BUT FOR THIS  
MAN, TO THINK  
IS TO ACT...



TO ACT IS TO STRIKE---

AND TO  
STRIKE---  
IS TO  
KILL!



HAN! DO THEY BREED  
SHARP-FANGED JACKALS  
HERE IN NEMEDIA?

BACK HOME,  
THERE WOULD  
NOW BE THREE  
DEAD WOLVES  
...OR ONE DEAD  
CIMMERIAN.







DID I--- HEAR  
YOU ARIGHT?

ARE YOU TRULY A  
**CIMMERIAN**-- ONE OF  
THOSE FIERCE-EYED  
**BARBARIANS**  
FROM OUT OF  
THE NORTHLAND?

IF I WERE ONE  
OF YOUR  
**CIVILIZED PALE-**  
**BLOODS, WENCH,**  
YOU'D NOW BE A  
FEAST FOR THOSE  
**WOLVES.**

DON'T  
CALL ME A  
**WENCH!**

JUST RIGHT MY  
**CHARIOT AGAIN**  
-- AND I'LL BE  
ON MY WAY.

YOU SCREAM FOR  
**HELP** ONE MINUTE--  
AND GIVE **ORDERS**  
THE NEXT, EH?

WELL, PER-  
HAPS I **WILL**  
RIGHT IT--



-- FOR REASONS--**HUHHN?**  
-- ALL MY OWN!



BUT, THERE WAS---  
SOMETHING **BENEATH**  
YOUR PRECIOUS  
CHARIOT.



OH--  
THAT'S  
JUST MY  
**DRIVER--!**



THEN-- **YOU** WILL CONDUCT  
ME BACK TO THE GATES OF  
NUMALIA, **BARBARIAN.**

HAVE YOU EVER  
**HANDLED A TEAM**  
AND CHARIOT  
BEFORE?

NO---**NEVER---**



BUT MAYBE **NOW**  
IS THE TIME TO  
**LEARN.**



NOT BAD --- FOR A NOVICE.  
BUT DO NOT PUT ON AIRS--  
FOR I KNOW WHY YOU  
SAVED MY LIFE.

OH?

OBTAININGLY,  
YOU WISH  
TO PASS  
THRU THE  
GUARDED  
GATES OF  
NUMALIA.

BY YOURSELF, YOU  
MIGHT GET A SPEAR  
IN THE BELLY-- AT  
LEAST A KICK IN THE  
BACKSIDE.

AH, BUT AS MY  
COMPANION-- NAY,  
AS MY DOCILE  
DRIVER--

WELCOME  
BACK, LADY  
AZTRIAS.

-- YOU MAY  
ENTER THE CITY  
IN FINE STYLE.

YOU'VE KEEN  
EYES AND A  
QUICK MIND--  
FOR A WOMAN.

WHAT ELSE  
DO YOU  
KNOW ABOUT  
ME?

I WOULD  
WAGER MUCH  
THAT YOU ARE,  
BY PROFESSION  
-- A THIEF.

AND THAT  
IS SOMETHING  
I MUST DISCUSS  
WITH YOU,  
BARBARIAN--

-- IF EVER WE ESCAPE THE HORDES WHICH CHOKED THE CITY'S MAIN PASSAGE.

THEN --  
ENOUGH  
OF THAT  
AVENUE  
OF SNAILS!

WE'LL GO THIS  
WAY --- AND  
DEVIL TAKE ANY  
WHO WOULD ---

CROM!

UNNH! MY  
CHARIOT'S  
WHEEL -- ITS  
BRAND-NEW  
WHEEL ---

YOURS HAS  
CRACKED IT!

YOU'LL PAY  
FOR THIS,  
YOU WILD-  
MANED  
SAVAGE --  
MARK ME!

I'LL MARK YOU WITH  
MY SWORD, PIG, IF  
YOU DON'T ---

HERE NOW!  
WHAT'S THIS  
UPROAR?

IT'S DIONUS,  
PREFECT OF THE  
CITY GUARD,  
WHO WANTS  
TO KNOW!





STAY YOUR SPEAR, MAN! THIS IS BETWEEN THE FAT ONE AND MYSELF.

HE-- HE'S GOING TO KILL ME!

RUN HIM THRU, YOU FOOL--- SLAY HIM!

YES, SIRE-- I--



IN CIMMERIA, WE FIGHT WITH OUR BLADES, PERFECT--

--NOT WITH OUR JAWS!



STOP-- ALL OF YOU! THIS MAN IS MY DRIVER-- NEW TO THE WAYS OF THE CITY.

LADY AZTRIAS? I-- DID NOT SEE YOU.



VERY WELL-- I'LL FORGET THIS MATTER, MY LADY-- SINCE THE SAVAGE IS IN YOUR KEEPING--

--THOUGH DEMETRIO WOULD SKIN ME FOR IT, IF HE KNEW.

GO ON YOUR WAY.



WHO WAS THAT BAD-TEMPERED DOG, GIRL?

WHICH ONE? I SAW THREE SUCH.



"THE RICH, CORPULENT ONE IS KALLIAN-- OWNER OF NUMALIA'S HALL OF RELICS--

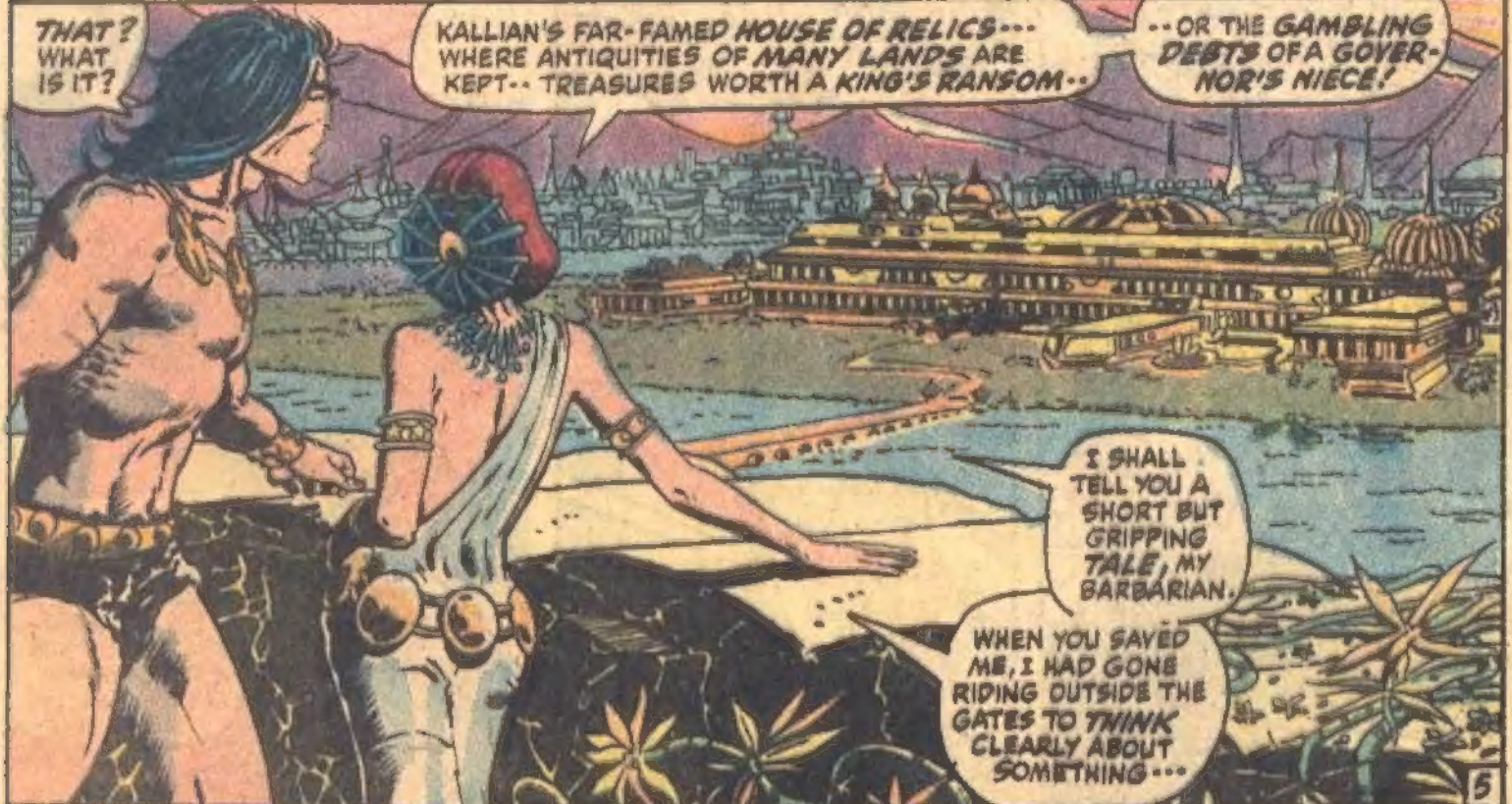
"-- AND THE BEARDED ONE IS DIONUS-- STUPID, SWinish, CRUEL.



CIVIL TO ME, OF COURSE. THERE ARE SOME ADVANTAGES STILL TO BEING NIECE TO A GOVERNOR.

YET, THERE ARE OTHER ILLS THAT NAUGHT BUT MONEY WILL CURE.

COME. I HAVE SOMETHING TO SHOW YOU.



THAT? WHAT IS IT?

KALLIAN'S FAR-FAMED HOUSE OF RELICS--- WHERE ANTIQUITIES OF MANY LANDS ARE KEPT-- TREASURES WORTH A KING'S RANSOM--

--OR THE GAMBLING DEBTS OF A GOVERNOR'S NIECE!

I SHALL TELL YOU A SHORT BUT GRIPPING TALE, MY BARBARIAN.

WHEN YOU SAVED ME, I HAD GONE RIDING OUTSIDE THE GATES TO THINK CLEARLY ABOUT SOMETHING...





"...ABOUT A CARAVAN, ARRIVED THIS MORN FROM DARK STYGIA FAR TO THE SOUTH..."

YOU WISH TO LEAVE THAT ANCIENT BOWL HERE OVERNIGHT? WHY?

'TIS A GIFT FROM ONES WHO MUST BE NAMELESS--

.. TO KARANTHES OF HANUMAR, PRIEST OF THE GOD-BIRD IBIS.

AYE! OTHER HANDS WILL CARRY IT TO THAT CITY ON THE MORROW.

BUT WE HAVE BUSINESS ELSEWHERE, AND MUST BE GONE AT ONCE.

"RICH AS FABLED KRASSUS IS OLD KALLIAN-- BUT STILL THE THOUGHT OF WHAT MIGHT LIE WITHIN THE GREAT LOCKED BOWL PLAGUED HIM--"

LADY AZTRIAS, I SORROW THAT I CANNOT HELP YOU--WITH THAT MONETARY MATTER.

PERHAPS IF YOU DARED SPEAK OF IT TO YOUR UNCLE, HE---

IT WAS GIVEN THE CARAVANERS, THEY SAY, BY MASKED ONES--

--WHO VOWED IT HOLDS A PRICELESS RELIC FOUND AMONG DEEP-SUNKEN TOMBS--

--AND WHO SAID THEY WISHED IT TO REACH WISE OLD KARANTHES..

".. BECAUSE OF THE LOVE WHICH THE SENDER BEARS THE PRIEST OF IBIS!"



"KALLIAN BELIEVES THE BOWL CONTAINS AN INCOMPARABLE TREASURE-- WEALTH BEYOND HIS WILDEST DREAMS--"

-- AND SO DO I! WHAT IS YOUR NAME, BARBARIAN?

I AM CONAN.

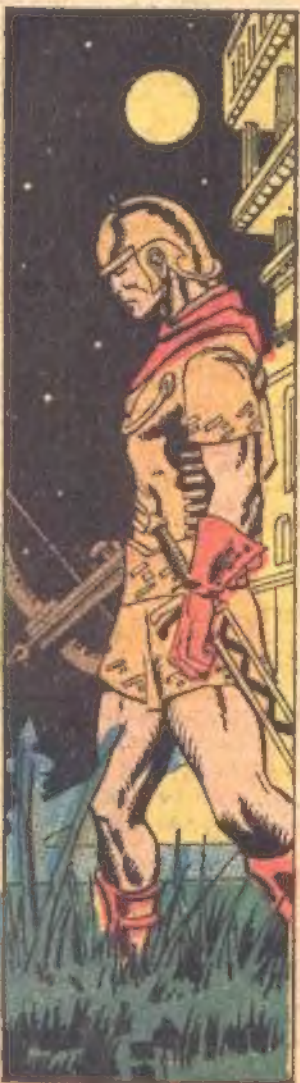
IT IS GOOD THAT I SHOULD KNOW YOUR NAME, CONAN--

-- BECAUSE TONIGHT-- WHEN THE HAUNTED HUSH OF MIDNIGHT LIES HEAVY ON THE LAND--

-- YOU SHALL STEAL THE CONTENTS OF THAT GREAT BOWL--FOR ME!











HUHN?



YAG-KOSHA!



BUT, TIS NOT THE ALIEN GOD-THING WHOM ONCE HE SLEW IN FAR-OFF ZAMORA---

NO, MERELY A REAL ELEPHANT-- AND STUFFED, IN THE BARGAIN!



NOW, SILENTLY, UNERRINGLY, YOUNG CONAN SEEKS OUT A DOORWAY MARKED WITH THE SIGN OF STYGIA---

STYGIA



-- ONLY TO FIND THERE ---

KALLIAN-- DEAD!

--AT THE VERY FOOT OF THE BOWL I SOUGHT!



THE BOWL IS OPEN-- EMPTY!

SOME OTHER THIEF BEAT ME TO IT, NO DOUBT.

NOTHING TO DO THEN, BUT--



WHAT? WHO THE DEVIL--?



STAND WHERE YOU ARE-- OR MY NEXT ARROW PIERCES YOUR HEART!

THEN--- YOU'RE THE ONE KILLED KALLIAN!

EH?

DON'T TRY TO CONFUSE ME, FOOL!



I AM ARUS-- KALLIAN'S NIGHTWATCH!



IT IS YOU WHO ARE THE MURDERER HERE---

---AND GLAD WILL BE THE CITY GUARD THAT I HAVE CAPTURED YOU!





SOUNDS! FIRST THE STRIDENT CLANG OF BELL-- THEN THE ROLLING THUNDER OF HOOF AND WHEEL---



WHAT DEVIL'S WORK IS AFOOT, WATCHMAN?

DEMETRIO! FORTUNE IS TRULY WITH ME.

THE CITY GUARD COME SWIFTLY--AND THE CHIEF INQUISITOR AMONG THEM!



I WAS MAKING THE ROUNDS WITH DIONUS HERE, WHEN--- ISHTAR!

THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE HIMSELF-- DEAD!

AYE-- AND MOST FOULLY MURDERED--STRANGLER, I'D SAY.

WHAT? THEN SEIZE THAT BAR-BARIAN, GUARDS-MEN.

MOVE, YOU LAGGARDS!

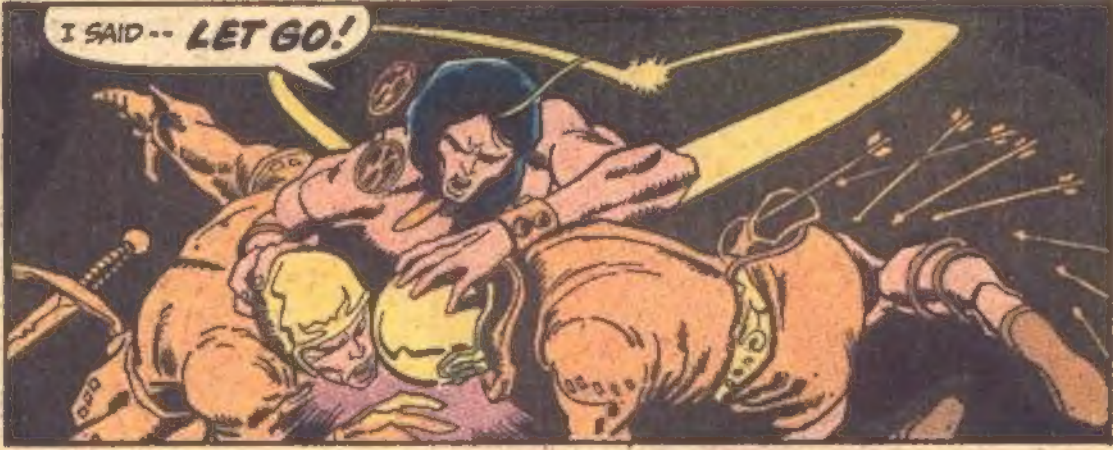


THERE'S YOUR KILLER, DEMETRIO.

ONLY TODAY, I HEARD HIM THREATEN KALLIAN-- HE INSULTED ME AS WELL.

SPEAK UP, HEATHEN! WHY DID YOU---

LET GO OF ME.



I SAID -- LET GO!



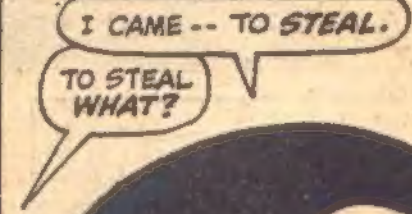
BY CROM, ANY MAN WHO TOUCHES ME AGAIN WILL QUICKLY GREET HIS ANCESTORS IN HELL.

EASY, FELLOW. YOU ARE NOT YET ACCUSED OF THIS CRIME.

STILL, THERE ARE QUESTIONS I MUST PUT YOU.



SUCH AS-- WHY CAME YOU HERE, IF NOT TO KILL THAT MAN?



I CAME -- TO STEAL. TO STEAL WHAT?

FOOD.



YOU LIE! YOU KNEW THERE'D BE NO FOOD HERE.

NOT A CHANCE, MY LORD..

ARUS... COULD ANY OTHER MAN HAVE DONE THE DEED.. AND SWEATED FAST YOU!

STILL, I'LL GO SEARCH THIS NEXT CHAMBER -- AND THE ONES ABOVE...

WE MUST ASSUME YOUR GUILT, BARBARIAN --- UNLESS YOU PROVE YOUR INNOCENCE.

BEST TELL THE TRUTH OF WHY YOU CAME HERE, OR...

ALL RIGHT.. WHY NOT? I CAME TO STEAL THE CONTENTS OF THAT GREAT BOWL..

..TO BE SURE THERE'S NO ACCOMPLICE LURKING ABOUT.

..A GIFT FROM AN UNKNOWN STYGIAN TO SOMEONE CALLED KARANTHES..

..PRIEST OF A GOD CALLED IBIS.

BUT I FOUND THE BOWL OPEN THUS.. AND KALLIAN STRANGLER.

WHY WOULD A STYGIAN SEND A GIFT TO A PRIEST OF IBIS?

THEY WORSHIP THE SERPENT-GOD SET IN STYGIA.. HE WHO COILS AMONGST THE OLD TOMBS..

..AND SET AND IBIS HAVE BEEN FOES SINCE THE EARTH'S FIRST DAWN..!

LET ME PASS. I AM AZTRIAS -- NIECE TO THE GOVERNOR.

OHH! MY GOOD FRIEND KALLIAN -- DEAD!

YOU KNOW THIS MAN?

CONAN, CONAN.. HOW COULD YOU..?

HE IS MY NEW DRIVER.. BUT HE AND KALLIAN QUARRELED ON THE STREET THIS DAY.

WHEN CONAN VANISHED, I RUSHED STRAIGHT HERE.. BUT TOO LATE, IT SEEMS!

WHILE, IN A NIGHTED CHAMBER NOT FAR D'ISTANT...

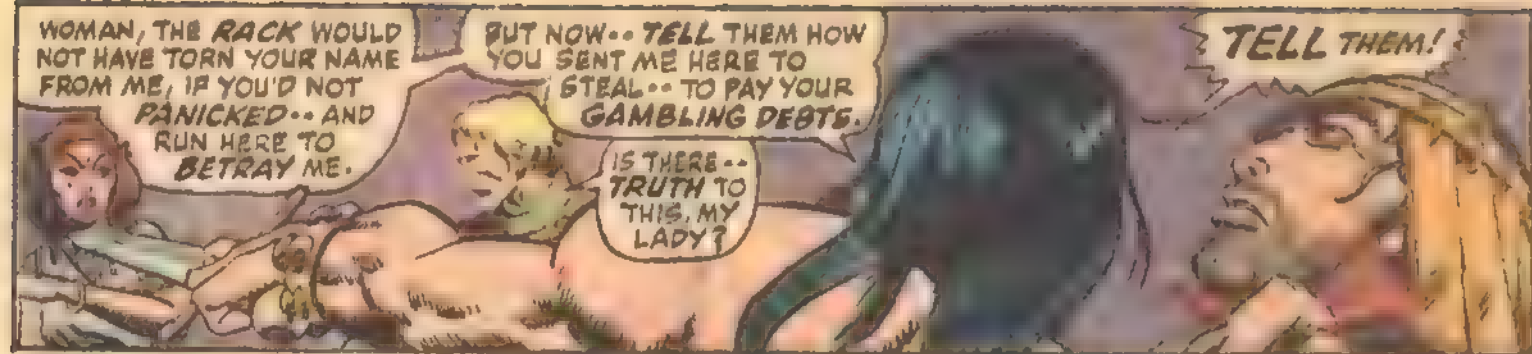
YOU LYING WITCH! YOU KNOW FULL WELL WHY I AM HERE..!

WE'VE ALL THE PROOF WE NEED. COME ALONG, YOU!

DIONUS..!

LAY ANOTHER HAND ON ME, DOG.. AND I'LL SPLIT YOUR SKULL LIKE AN OVERRIPE PEA!





WOMAN, THE RACK WOULD NOT HAVE TORN YOUR NAME FROM ME, IF YOU'D NOT PANICKED-- AND RUN HERE TO BETRAY ME.

BUT NOW-- TELL THEM HOW YOU SENT ME HERE TO STEAL-- TO PAY YOUR GAMBLING DEBTS.

IS THERE-- TRUTH TO THIS, MY LADY?

TELL THEM!

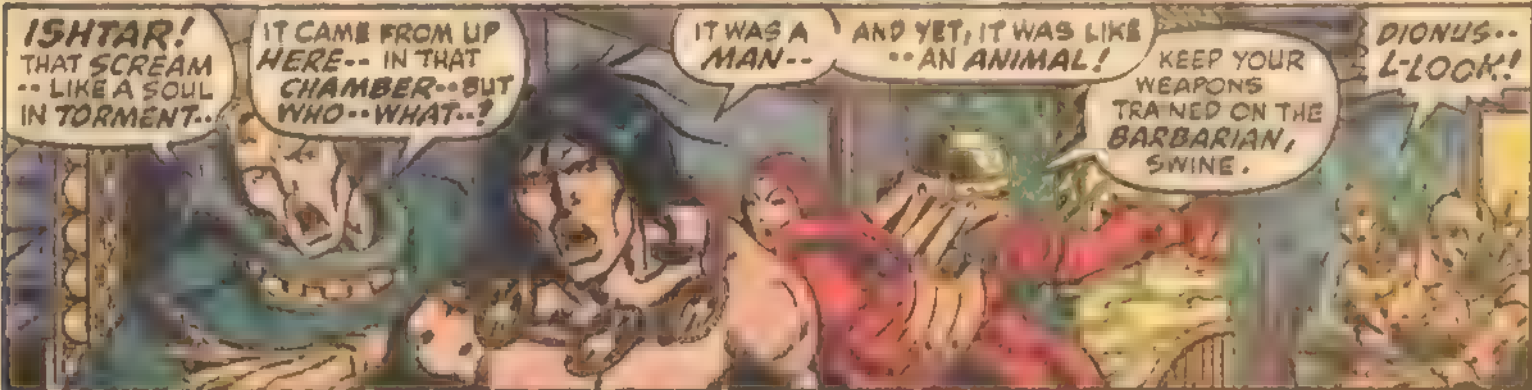


OH, DEMETRIO-- HOW CAN YOU EVEN QUESTION ME?

HE LIES. HE LIES!



IF YOU WERE A MAN, YOU'D NOW BE HEAD-LESS, WENCH--OR ELSE--



ISHTAR! THAT SCREAM-- LIKE A SOUL IN TORMENT--

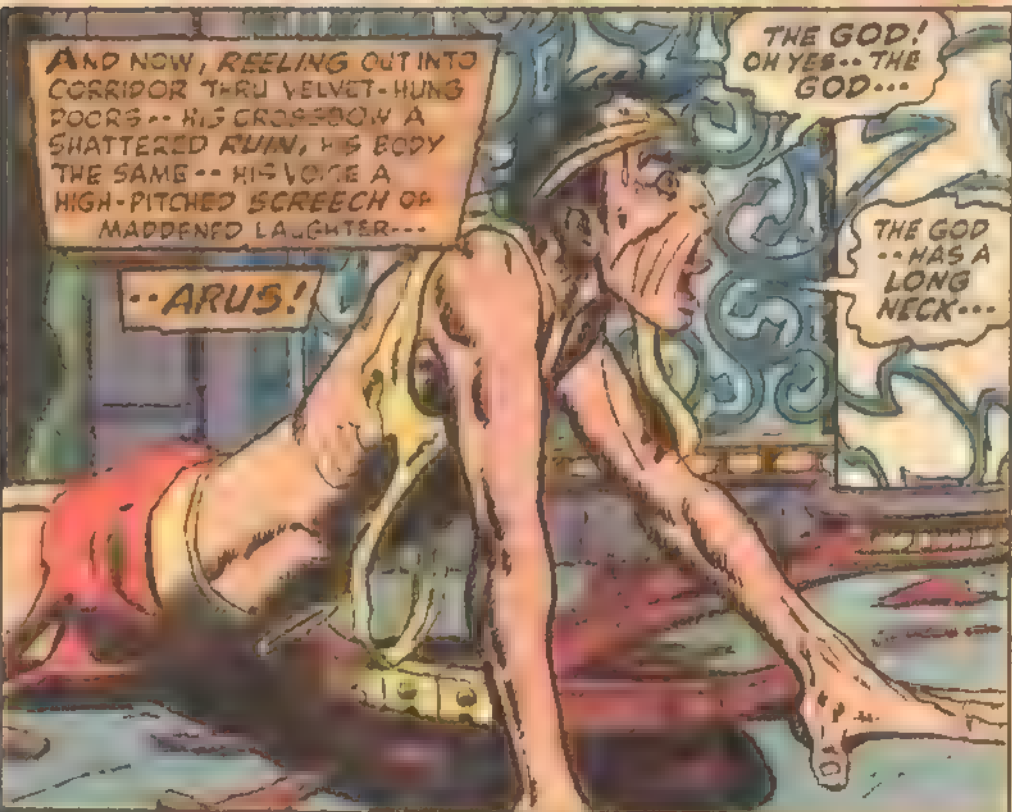
IT CAME FROM UP HERE-- IN THAT CHAMBER--BUT WHO--WHAT--?

IT WAS A MAN--

AND YET, IT WAS LIKE-- AN ANIMAL!

KEEP YOUR WEAPONS TRAINED ON THE BARBARIAN, SWINE.

DIONUS-- L-LOOK!



AND NOW, REELING OUT INTO CORRIDOR THRU VELVET-HUNG DOORS-- HIS CROSSBOW A SHATTERED RUIN, HIS BODY THE SAME-- HIS VOICE A HIGH-PITCHED SCREECH OF MADDENED LAUGHTER--

--ARUS!

THE GOD! OH YES-- THE GOD...

THE GOD --HAS A LONG NECK...



--OH, A-- CURSED-- LONG-- NECKK...



HE'S-- DEAD-- WITH  
NOT A MARK ON HIM!

IN MITRA'S  
NAME--  
WHAT IS  
IN THAT  
CHAM-  
BER?

THAT, DIONUS, IS  
PRECISELY WHAT I  
INTEND TO FIND  
OUT.

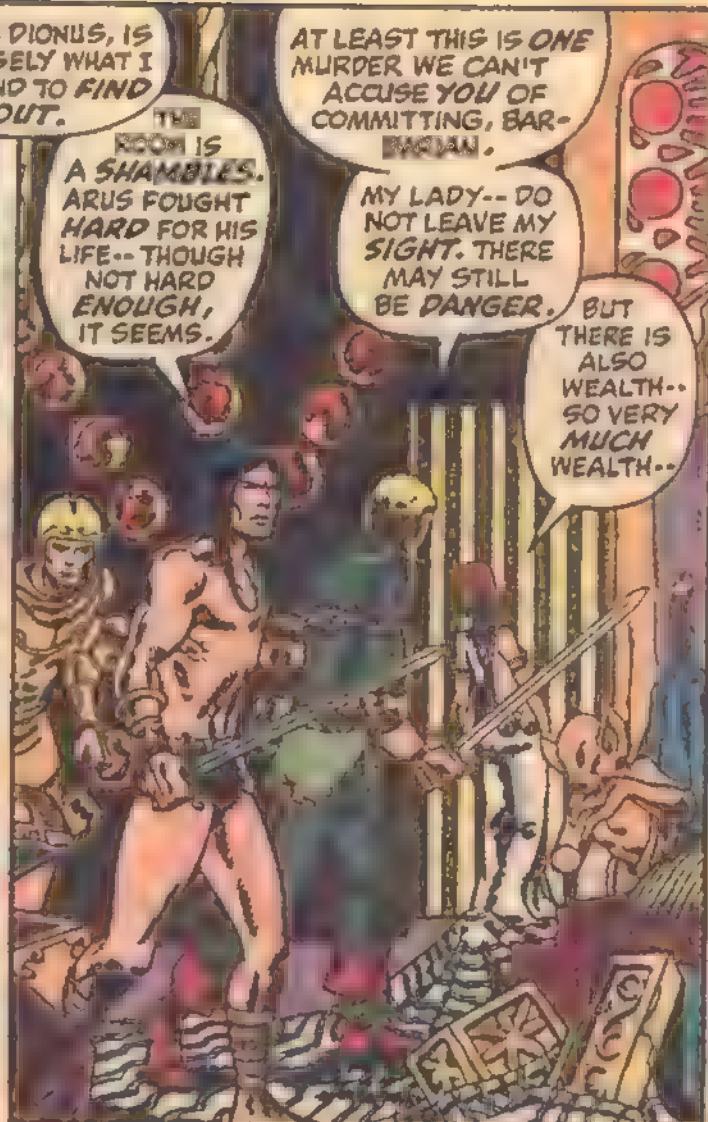
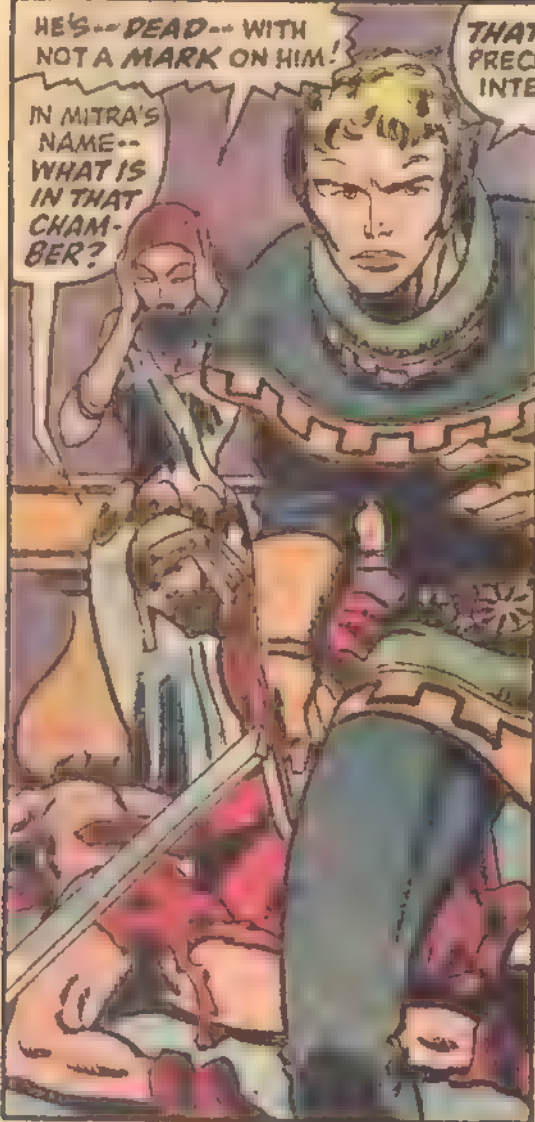
THE  
ROOM IS  
A SHAMBLES.  
ARUS FOUGHT  
HARD FOR HIS  
LIFE-- THOUGH  
NOT HARD  
ENOUGH,  
IT SEEMS.

AT LEAST THIS IS ONE  
MURDER WE CAN'T  
ACCUSE YOU OF  
COMMITTING, BAR-  
BARIAN.

MY LADY-- DO  
NOT LEAVE MY  
SIGHT. THERE  
MAY STILL  
BE DANGER.

BUT  
THERE IS  
ALSO  
WEALTH--  
SO VERY  
MUCH  
WEALTH--

AYE, WEALTH--  
AND, FROM BEHIND  
A HEAVY GILDED  
SCREEN--A FACE--



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--A FACE THAT  
WELL MIGHT BE  
THE MARBLED  
MASK OF A GOD,  
CARVED BY SOME  
MASTER HAND---

EXCEPT  
THAT---

---THIS  
MASK---

--LIVES!

NEITHER WEARINESS,  
NOR MERCY, NOR CRUELTY,  
NOR KINDNESS, NOR ANY  
OTHER HUMAN EMOTION  
SHOWS IN THAT COLD,  
CLASSIC COUNTENANCE--

MY  
LADY...

WHAT..?

COME.

13



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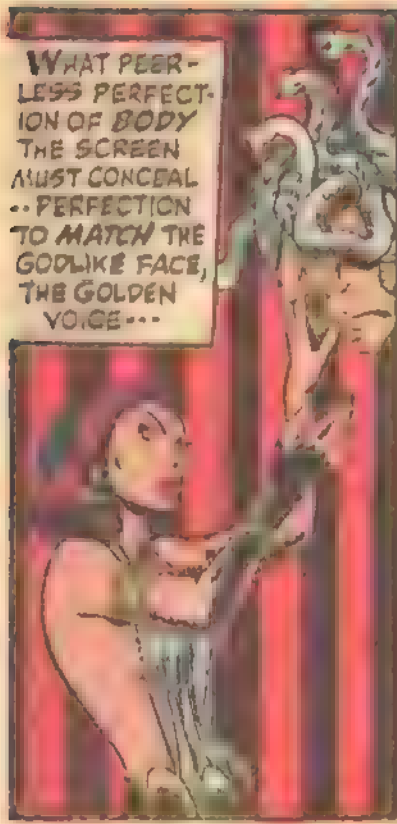
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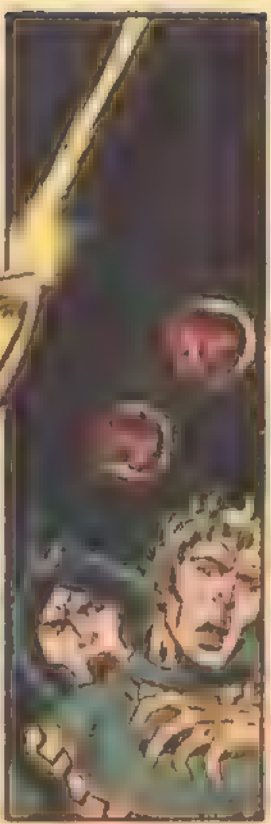
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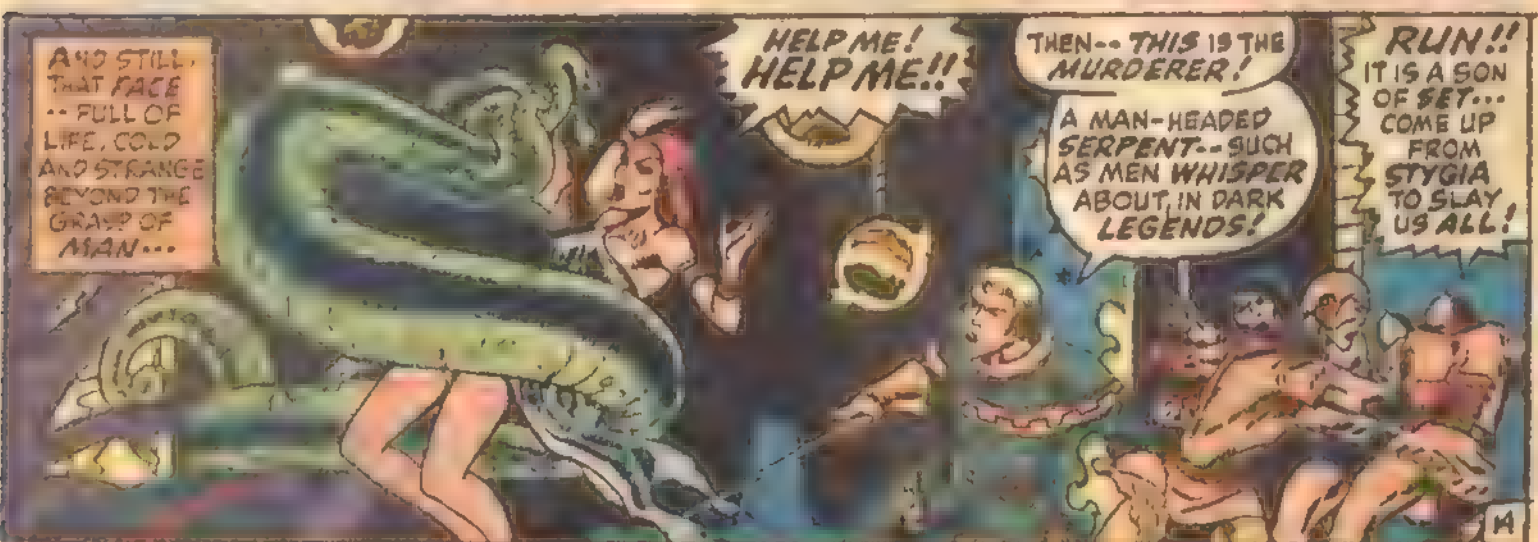


WHAT PEER-  
LESS PERFECT-  
ION OF BODY  
THE SCREEN  
MUST CONCEAL  
--PERFECTION  
TO MATCH THE  
GODLIKE FACE,  
THE GOLDEN  
VOICE---



IT SPEAKS NOT AGAIN-- BUT WITH  
A TREASING, A SHIMMERING, A  
SUDDEN LUNGING OUTWARD---

--IT  
STRIKES!



AND STILL,  
THAT FACE  
-- FULL OF  
LIFE, COLD  
AND STRANGE  
BEYOND THE  
GRASP OF  
MAN---

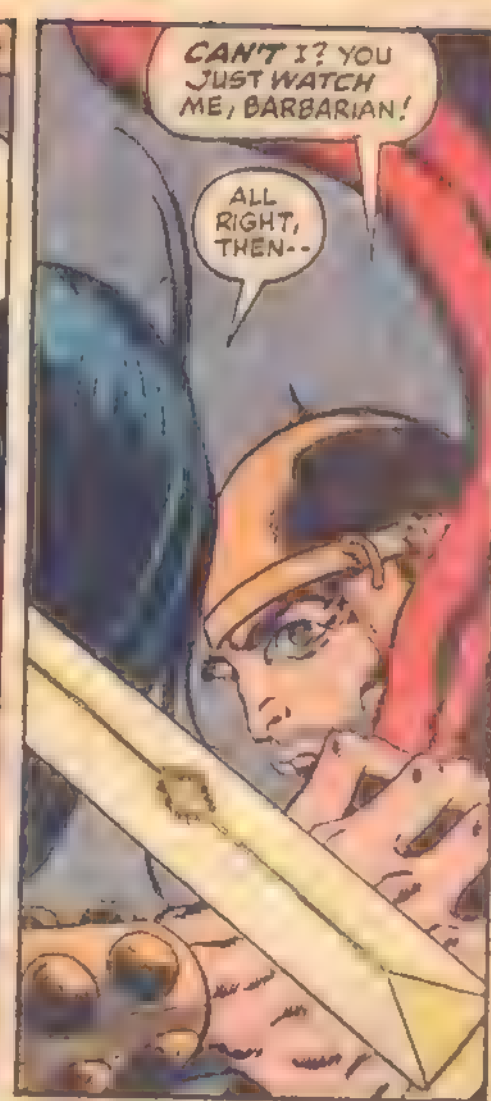
HELP ME!  
HELP ME!!

THEN-- THIS IS THE  
MURDERER!

A MAN-HEADED  
SERPENT-- SUCH  
AS MEN WHISPER  
ABOUT IN DARK  
LEGENDS!

RUN!!  
IT IS A SON  
OF SET...  
COME UP  
FROM  
STYGIA  
TO SLAY  
US ALL!







THEN, BY  
CROM, I'LL  
DO WHAT  
HE COULD  
NOT--!



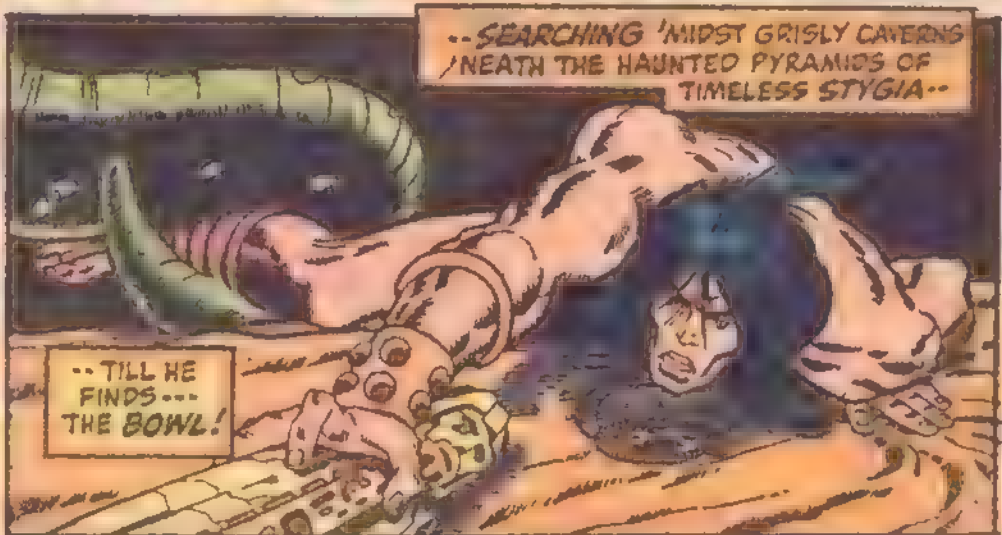
-- VISIONS OF A MAN, CLOAKED IN ROBES AND DARKNESS,  
TORCH CLENCHED IN BONE-WHITE FINGERS--



I'LL  
MAKE  
YOU  
SCREAM!



-- SEARCHING 'MIDST GRISLY CAVERNS  
'NEATH THE HAUNTED PYRAMIDS OF  
TIMELESS STYGIA--



-- TILL HE  
FINDS---  
THE BOWL!

FOR, THE GODS OF  
EONS FAST DID NOT  
DIE AS MEN DIE---  
BUT FELL INTO LONG  
SLUMBERS, TILL  
WAKENED BY ONE  
STEEPED ENOUGH  
IN SORCERY TO  
COMMAND THEM--!

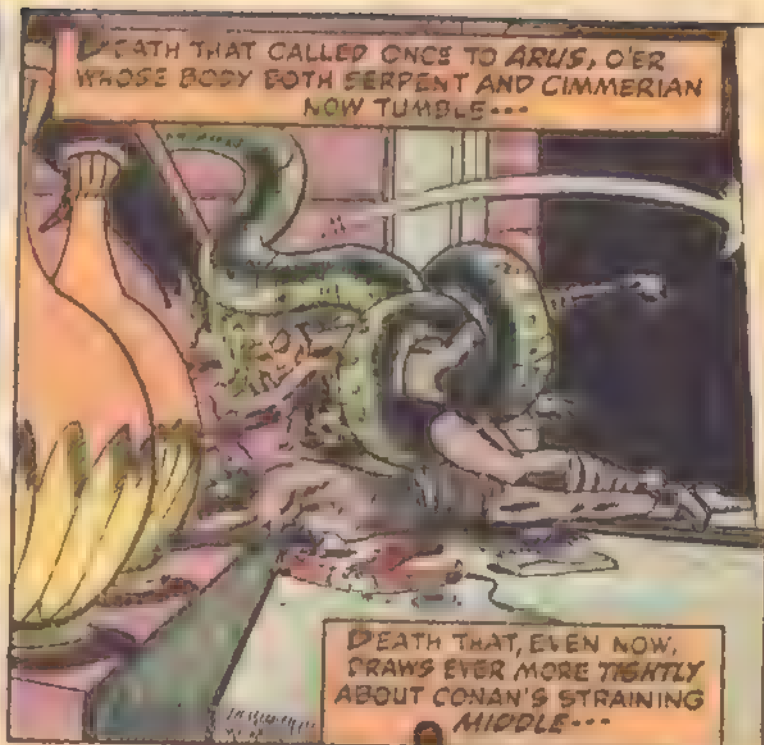


AND, AS INHUMAN SHRIEK IS  
TORN FROM GHASTLY THROAT, A  
STREAM OF UNEARTHLY IMAGES  
SUDDENLY FLOODS IN UPON THE  
EMBATTLED BARBARIAN---





AND THAT ONE HAD  
SENT DEATH TO  
THE PRIEST OF IBIS  
--COILED DEATH  
THAT SPRANG  
FORTH AT KALLIAN  
WHEN HE LOOSED  
THE LIP OF THE  
GREAT BOWL---

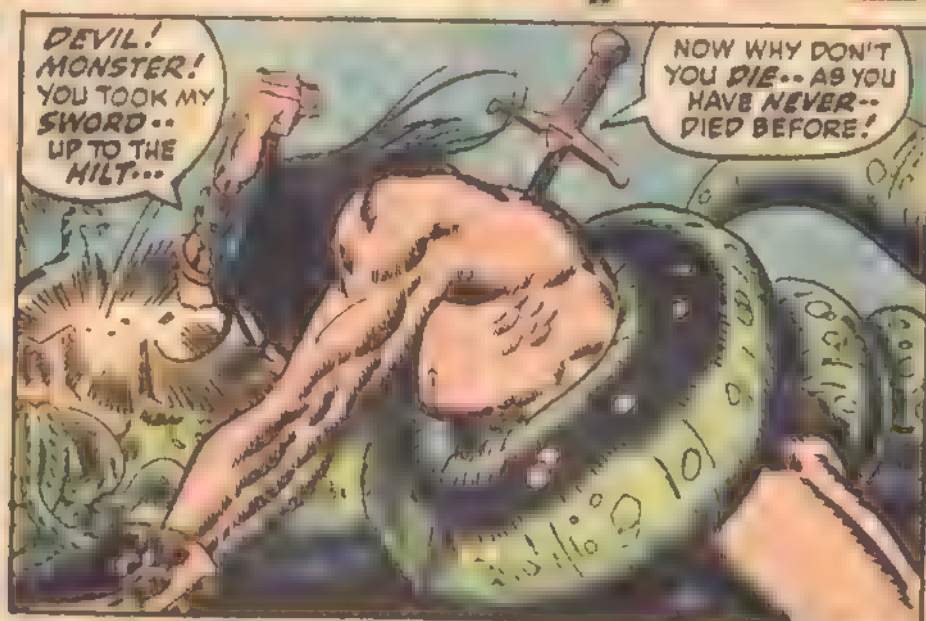


DEATH THAT CALLED ONCE TO ARUS, O'ER  
WHOSE BODY BOTH SERPENT AND CIMMERIAN  
NOW TUMBLE---

DEATH THAT, EVEN NOW,  
DRAWS EVER MORE TIGHTLY  
ABOUT CONAN'S STRAINING  
MIDDLE---



DEATH THAT,  
HALF-GLIMPSED,  
CAN MAKE A  
MAN MAD!



DEVIL!  
MONSTER!  
YOU TOOK MY  
SWORD--  
UP TO THE  
HILT--

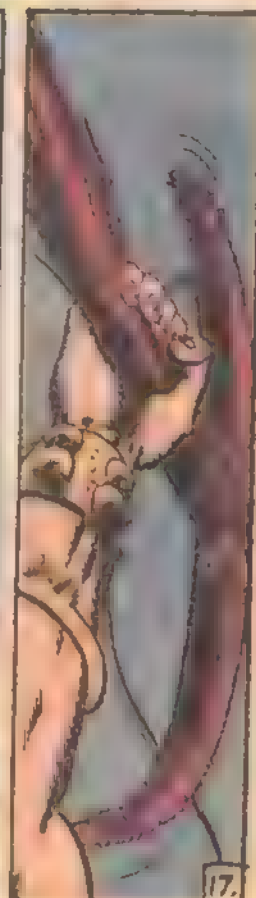
NOW WHY DON'T  
YOU DIE-- AS YOU  
HAVE NEVER--  
DIED BEFORE!



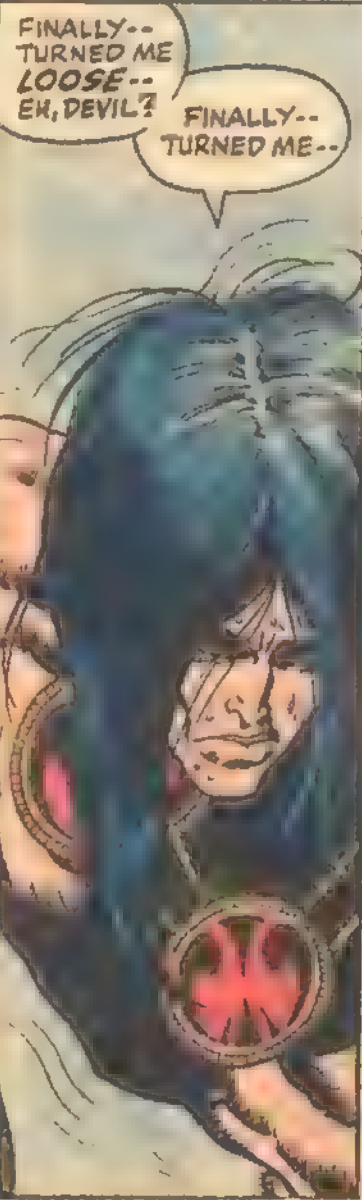
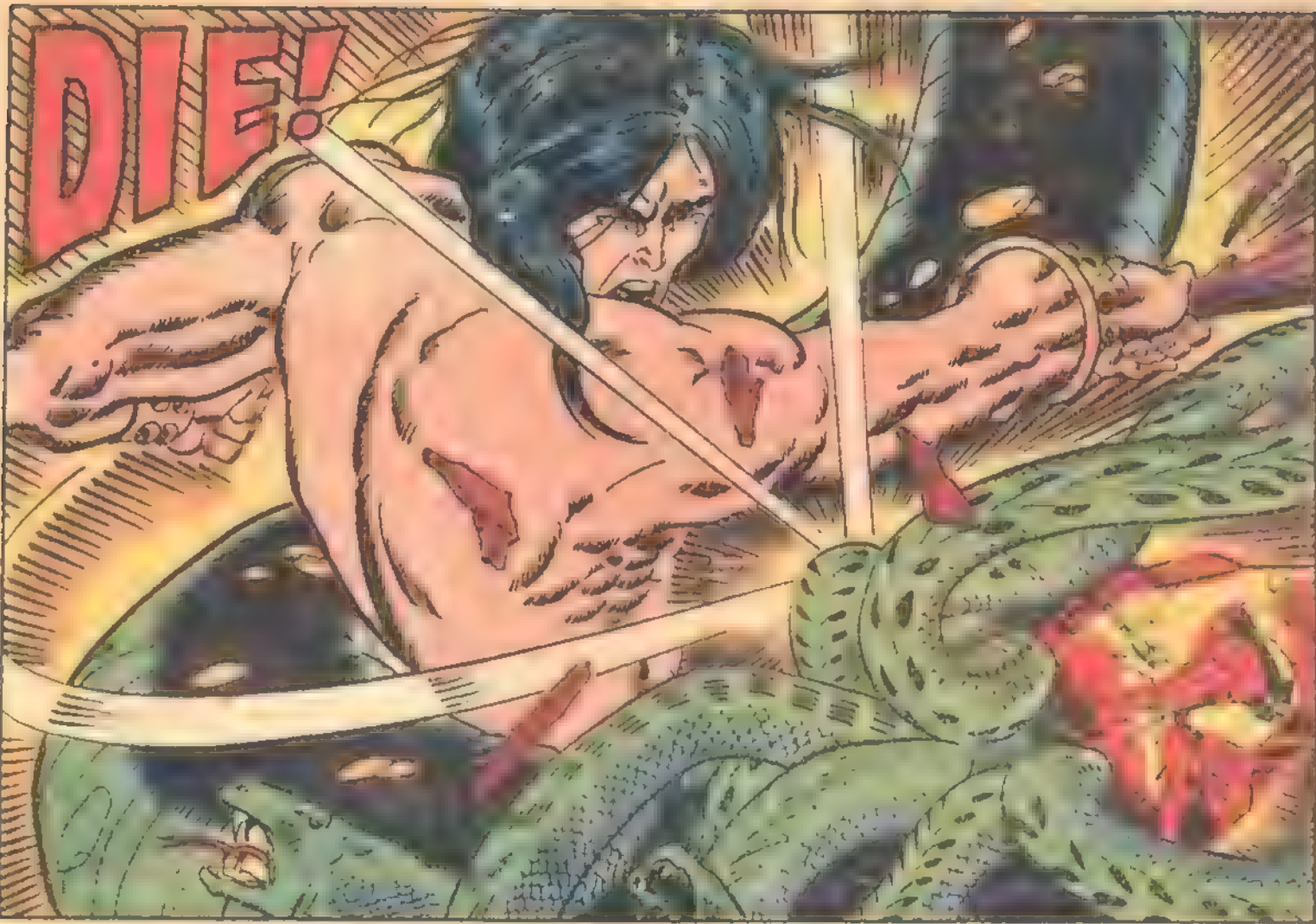
DIE...  
BLAST  
YOUR  
BONES--



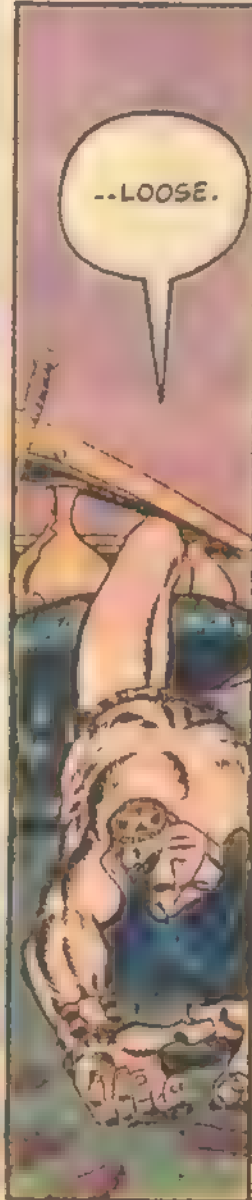
DIE--!







FINALLY--  
TURNED ME  
LOOSE--  
ER, DEVIL? FINALLY--  
TURNED ME--



--LOOSE.



NOW, 'TIS STILL--AS  
SILENT AS IT MUST  
INDEED HAVE BEEN---

--WITHIN THOSE  
DANK, DEEP  
SEPULCHRES  
'NEATH STYGIAN  
SANDS.



BUT, AT  
LENGTH,  
SOMETHING  
STIRS--  
LIFE STIRS--

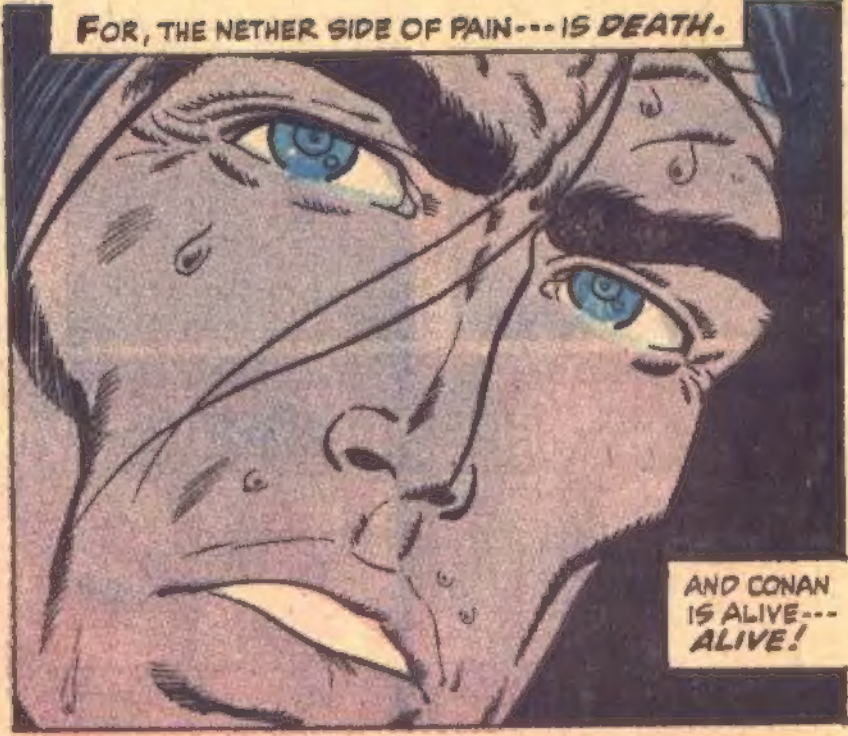


AND IT IS PAIN THAT BIRTHS THE STIRRING...  
A THROBBING IN TEMPLES THAT HAD NEARLY  
BURST, IN A RIGHT HAND THAT HAD  
BATTERED A STONE-COLD BROW...

BUT, EVEN THE  
PAIN IS GOOD  
TO FEEL...



FOR, THE NETHER SIDE OF PAIN... IS DEATH.



AND CONAN  
IS ALIVE...  
ALIVE!

OTHER LIFE,  
TOO, WRITHES  
FITFULLY IN  
THE HOUSE OF  
RELICS...  
DEMETRIO,  
WHOSE SPLINT-  
ERED RIBS WILL  
HEAL WITH TIME  
AND TROUBLE...

BUT AS FOR  
THE REST...



...DEAD.



ALL,  
ALL...



...DEAD!







LIKE A MAN *POSSESSED*, YOUNG CONAN GAZES INTO THE BOWL... AND HE KNOWS, SOMEHOW, THAT HE LOOKS UPON THE FACE AND FEATURES OF *THOTH-AMON*...

*THOTH-AMON*... MOST FEARED OF STYGIAN WIZARDS... HE WHO AWAKENED AND NOW COMMANDS THE SONS OF SET, THE SERPENT-GOD...

THE THOUGHT OF SET IS LIKE A NIGHTMARE... --AY, AND OF THE CHILDREN OF SET, WHO ONCE DID RULE THE EARTH, AND THEN DID SLEEP IN NIGHTED CAVERNS BELOW THE BLACK PYRAMIDS...

AND NOW, AT LAST, THE FULL HORROR OF IT ALL RUSHES OVER CONAN...

-- AND HE FLEES...

NOR DOES HE SLACKEN HIS HEADLONG FLIGHT...

...UNTIL THE SHIMMERING SPIRES OF THRICE-CURSED NUMALIA FADE INTO COMING DAWN BEHIND HIM...!



# THE HYBORIAN PAGE

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Dear Stan, Roy, Barry, etc.

Congratulations on CONAN THE BARBARIAN. Of all Howard's successors and imitators, bar none, you have done the best. As others have said before me, you have captured the living essence of the Hyborian age. The stories are magnificent, and for the most part the art is fantastic. Something that is part of the Howardian magic has been recaptured in this amazing magazine.

I do have one or two complaints, however. For one thing — as others of your readers have noticed — Conan himself does not seem big enough. Even as a youth he was a massive man, though I'll admit that in some panels he seems larger than in others. Conan, as he appears on the book covers Frank Frazetta does, is far closer to my idea of a northern barbarian.

Another point — the panels aren't big enough to give full scope to the grandeur of the scenes they portray. It seems a waste of time when a spectacular scene like the second coming of the Choosers of the Slain (#3) is squeezed into five relatively tiny panels that do not add up to even half a page.

But these things are picayune (as, no doubt, you'll agree) when taken against the whole of the finished product. I was as impressed as when I read my last Howardian CONAN story — and for me that's saying a lot. Well Done!

Mike Stamm

Connon Beach, Oregon 97110

Many thanks, Mike — the more so because the "successors and imitators" of Robert E. Howard whom you mention include the likes of L. Sprague deCamp, Michael Moorcock, John Jakes, and a host of other talented fantasy writers.

We'll have to agree with you that Conan should, indeed, be somewhat larger of physique than he has heretofore been — and we hope gradually to beef him up as he (and we) grow older. Stick with us, friend — and we think he'll eventually be mighty-muscled enough for all but the most diehard of Howardophiles.

If that "Howardian magic" you spoke of isn't captured in the pages of future issues of CONAN THE BARBARIAN — we assure you it won't be because Roy and Barry don't approach each and every issue as a brand new attempt to create that most difficult of all things: a comic-book classic, as so acclaimed by you, the multitudes of readers.

By the way, in case we forgot to mention it last go-round, is there anybody out there who doesn't know that CONAN #2 (one of the only two issues of the magazine published in calendar year 1970) was one of the five tales nominated by the newly-formed Academy of Comic Book Arts as best comics story of the year? Not a bad start for first crack at bat, eh?

Gentlemen,

Comic books seldom can be realistic, and a fantasy comic certainly can't be realistic. But if you accept the background assumptions of the comic, it can be realistic enough on its own terms.

Fantasy though it is, CONAN had that realism in its first two issues. I have some criticism of the third issue, though. In the first two issues, it was carefully pointed out for the careful reader that in each of the struggles the numbers of participants were small. When Vanir fought Aesgaardian in issue number one, fewer than a hundred fighters were involved on the two sides together. That much was made obvious; so each fighter counted. When man-ape oppressed manling in issue number two, I had the definite idea that there were no more than one or two thousand apes altogether, and maybe half as many manlings. These numbers

are of course a mere impression, but they make plausible the way Conan won so easily. (By the way, what were the numbers?) But how much effect is Conan's heroism going to have, all in all, in issue number three when he is but one of forty thousand fighters? Not so much, I'm afraid!

As we see, the Brythunians win the battle and defeat the Hyperboreans. But the victory was a fairly close thing. It is no massacre. Yet the last worshippers of Borri and the primitive Hyperborean gods are killed. How can this be, unless King Tomar was virtually the last serious worshipper of Borri? That is not impossible; it could well be that hardly a single serious worshipper of the old Hyperborean gods existed. Religions have faded before. But how can it be that not one single worshipper of the old gods remained alive in Hyperbores? That no peasant in his hut, no slave in his pen, no merchant in the city, nor any noblewoman or lord, worshipped Borri in his heart — yet the brutish King Tomar, who seemed to have no gods at all, still did? It seems impossible . . .

Well, anyway. Several things worth saying: first, in a saga like CONAN, the use of normal punctuation somehow seems important. It slows down the pace a trifle, makes it solemn and serious — and it fits. Second, I noticed, especially in issue number one, how you kept showing the Hyborian world as underdeveloped, even impoverished. It explains so well why Conan would fight and risk his life daily for the Aesir and others, just for a living! In passing, it also seems to explain why people accepted some pretty sour deals in life, just for a bare living. Third, don't fall, please, into the old comic-book trap of having characters talking when there is no one for them to talk to. Please use thought balloons: people seldom talk to themselves past perhaps one or two short, disconnected phrases. Still less do they talk audibly. That always has been one of my complaints with the comics.

Sincerely,

Michael N. Tierstein, 1577 E. 37th St.  
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11234

But another complaint which many older readers have had with comics over the years, Michael, is the very use of the thought balloons which you would like to see. Thus it was, that, though the thought balloon has been the hallmark of mighty Marvel for virtually a decade, Roy Thomas decided to try doing CONAN without them. You'll note that we've cut down those rare sequences where the young Cimmerian speaks to himself — and that, when he does, they tend to resemble (in form, if hardly in eloquence, he blushingly admits) the soliloquy form of an earlier tradition. And that's the way things will probably remain.

By the way, Roy would like herewith to admit most humbly that his original intention (in editing the story, some weeks after writing it) was to cut down the announced sizes of the Hyperborean and Brythunian forces to about one-tenth of the 40,000 you mention — but that, at the last moment, he left the figures which Howard had used in his non-Conan story from which our third issue was adapted. In retrospect, he feels he erred — and he'll try not to make the same mistake again.

However, he does feel that it would take more than one or two random worshippers left alive somewhere in Hyperborea to feed the ego and godlike appetite of the Grey God Borri — so that the latter might well indeed have faded from the scene after thousands of his most ardent surviving acolytes were destroyed in this ancient battle. Our barbarian hero will doubtless return to Hyperborea in some future issue, however — and then, we shall see what we shall see, by Crom!

## KNOW YE THESE, THE HALLOWED RANKS OF MARVELDOM:

**R.F.O.** (Real Frantic One) — A buyer of at least 3 Marvel mags a month.  
**T.T.B.** (Titanic True Believer) — A divinely-inspired "No-Prize" winner.  
**Q.N.S.** (Quite 'Nuff Sayer) — A fortunate frantic one who's had a letter printed.

**K.O.F.** (Keeper Of the Flame) — One who recruits a newcomer to Marvel's rollickin' ranks.  
**P.M.M.** (Permanent Marvelite Maximus) — Anyone possessing all four of the other titles.  
**F.F.F.** (Fearless Front-Facer) — An honorary title bestowed for devotion to Marvel above and beyond the call of duty.



Dear Stan, Roy and Barry,

Can this be real? Can such grandeur truly exist outside the boundaries of the wildest conceivable scope of imagination? Such were the emotions which circled through my dizzy brain as I picked up a copy of CONAN THE BARBARIAN No. 3. I must admit that I was well-nigh appalled at the very idea of attempting to introduce the sword-wielding Cimmerian into the blood-and-sex-less realm of Code-approved Marvel. Even if such a tremendous challenge were undertaken, how would it be possible to capture the adventure and savagery of Robert E. Howard? But by the seven gates of Valhalla, YOU HAVE DONE IT!!! Yes, by Ishtar, you have successfully accomplished the impossible! Never in the entire history of Marvel has an undertaking of such magnitude been this successful. There are, however, a few things which I simply cannot keep my maw shut about. Not criticism, mind you, but advice. Unfortunately, I was denied the opportunity of your first issue and discovering what the entire torchwaving community was raving about, but I can comment on your second and third issues, and by Crom, I shall.

First (now there's an original line): I was elated to discover that there were no dialogue balloons on the cover of issue three, as compared to issue two. Words cannot sufficiently describe or express my hatred of word balloons which appear without mercy on the covers of most of your more recent comics, and all of them could be done away with. I do not find them appealing at all, and they detract horribly from the beauty of the cover itself. It is not like you, Stan, to mar your works and sacrifice the quality for the sake of a few paltry dollars. So, keep America beautiful and keep word balloons off the covers.

But, enough of this petty complaining. The character himself you have adapted, for the most part, very well into the comic. However, as any reader of Robert E. Howard's CONAN knows, he was a veritable giant of a man, with swarthy skin and "smoldering blue eyes burning from a scarred, youthful face." I suppose, though, that this could be excused by pointing out that there are tales of Conan when he was still very much in his youth, so he would still be rather pink-skinned and free of too many scars. I know not how to express with enough depth my complete worship (seriously) of the majestic artwork which gushes from the talent-riddled pen of a certain Barry Smith. I greeted the Englishman's renditions of Daredevil with dismay, and of the Avengers with horror. Now I realize that he is one of the best, if not THE best creative artist in his field, and he was merely given the wrong type of work. The pages literally burst with detail and sheer savagery which I have found nowhere else. So, whatever changes you may choose to make, you had best not venture to pull a permanent artist change. Allow me to repeat my warning. Change artists, and not all of the serpents in Set's command shall save

you from my vengeance! Ditto for the inker, Sal Buscema.

My last, and what I consider my most important point is this: I feel that it is a good idea to either make this a monthly issue, or a bi-monthly 25¢ issue, whichever you prefer. Let me caution you, however, if you find that, by doing this, that you are forced to pay less attention to the quality of your mag, then by all means do not do so. I would rather suffer for a month without Conan than to face a disappointment every month. Say, before I forget, is that blood I spy on panel 2 of the last page of Conan #3? Just curious.

So, until Conan is afraid of the dark, until Crom endows all warriors with cowardice, and until Zamora receives a citation for the lowest crime-rate in the county, MAKE MINE MARVEL!!!!

EXCELSIOR!

David Milner, 134 College Park Drive  
Monroeville, Pennsylvania 15146

Then 't would appear, Dave, that you've a long and happy Hyborian Age ahead of you!

Incidentally, Roy and Barry feel that they're going to be able to handle the CONAN magazine even better as a monthly than they could as a bimonthly. To that end, Roy has had to temporarily give up writing his beloved SUB-MARINER, and Barry is no longer penciling the adventures of Ka-Zar in ASTONISHING TALES — but CONAN THE BARBARIAN goes rolling right along! We hope you agree, after perusing this issue's tale, which is a thorough-going adaptation of Robert E. Howard's story "The God in the Bowl" — and which, incidentally, is the result of a several-hours plotting session which Roy and Barry had when the traveling Mr. T. visited London last July! Our two stalwarts decided at that time to treat the story (which would not, in its original form, have made the kind of comics story they wanted) as if they were plotting a screenplay — and the result was the changing of Aztrias from a man in the original story into a woman (for obvious reasons), a lengthened battle with the man-headed serpent of the Stygian god Set, and a number of other items which we're sure you'll be telling them about for the next few months!

And, though Sal Buscema inked only the final half of this month's saga (to help out Dan Adkins, who got off to a late start on the issue thru no fault of his own), we hope you agree that Dapper Dan — who inked the very first issue of CONAN — is the most logical of replacements. Excelsior!

## NEXT THE KINGS IN THE CRYPT!

**THE FATEFUL CHOICE!**

**ONCE I DECIDE--**

**-- THERE CAN BE NO TURNING BACK!**

**THIS IS THE BIG ONE!**

**STORY BY: STAN LEE**      **ART BY: JOHN ROMITA**

**DON'T MISS THIS TURNING-POINT TRIUMPH-- IN THE LATEST ISSUE OF...**

**NOW ON SALE!**

**CAPTAIN AMERICA AND THE FALCON**

15¢ JULY 1971